Mother-in-Law's Tongue

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Mother-in-Law's Tongue

by sainthannibal

Summary

"Tell me, Will," Hannibal entreated. "Is it that you still have hope? Hope that she will return?" Hannibal cupped his cheek with a gentle hand, his fingers swiping over my cheekbone with a sweetness like whiskey. He met his hand with his own, curling his fingers around his and pulling them away from his bearded face.

"Not that she'll return. That maybe she'd see me on the news and realize what her leaving did to me."

Notes

Happy Mother's Day!

Enjoy this additon to the Dianthus Barbatus universe!

See the end of the work for more notes

Wolf Trap was quiet in the evenings. That’s what Will enjoyed the most about his home.

The seclusion.

The isolation.

The privacy. Especially, the privacy to argue with his husband.

"I'd rather not go back." Will stated, not adamantly, but he was not passive. "I'll never go back. Not after what happened there."

"But we happened there," Hannibal breathed calmly. His heart rate did not elevate as he began to argue with Will. It only infuriated Will more.

"I know, sweetheart, but we just can't. I won't at least." Will reached out to stroke Hannibal's face, his thumb rubbing his cheekbone. Hannibal met him with a frown.

"Don't you want to see your father's grave? See your mother?"

"My mother walked out on me and my pa a long time ago." Will muttered, his voice a low growl in his chest.

"And if you were able to find her?"

"She left more than thirty years ago. I doubt she's still down there."

"We often return to places which hold guilt."

"You found her, didn't you? You always go sticking your nose where it doesn't belong,"

"I beg your pardon?" Hannibal asked, his voice barely going up in pitch.

"You heard me, you and your God complex think you can control anything and everything just as you please."

"No, you did this for you. For your own satisfaction. Ego. Self-congratulation. What's your problem?" Will nearly shouted, unable to contain himself any longer. Hannibal brought out the very worst in him right alongside the very best.

"I want to meet her," Hannibal breathed calmly.

"For what? So you can kill my mama? Avenge my childhood? She may have left me, but the last thing I want her is dead."

"Why?"

"'Why' what?" Will parroted back at Hannibal.

"Why don't you wish her an ill-fated end?"

"Because she's still family," Will lied, but Hannibal knew it.

"That's not true, is it?"

Will's silence betrayed him.

"Tell me, Will," Hannibal entreated. "Is it that you still have hope? Hope that she will return?" Hannibal cupped his cheek with a gentle hand, his fingers swiping over his cheekbone with a sweetness like whiskey. He met his hand with his own, curling his fingers around his and pulling them away from his bearded face.

"Not that she'll return. That maybe she'd see me on the news and realize what her leaving did to me."

Will poured himself a drink and set it on their dining room table. He took a sip, then set the drink down. The burn reminded him too much of his father. With a wave of his hand, he turned and parted from Hannibal's side, trying to quell the nausea that churned in his gut. He would finish the drink later, but with his back turned, he neglected to watch Hannibal slip something into the glass.

"Good morning, Will!" Hannibal chirped from the driver's seat. He reached into the cupholder and procured a travel mug. "Would you like some coffee, darling?" Hannibal offered, one hand on the steering wheel, one hand reaching into Will's lap.

"Where are we? Where are you taking us?" Will rubbed his groggy eyes.

"We are in the great state of Virginia."

"Hannibal..." Will began cautiously, not taking the coffee. He sat up in his seat and readjusted his seat belt. He pushed Hannibal's hand down, forcing him to put the coffee back into the cup holder. "Where are we going?"

"Home. To Louisiana."

"You bastard! You fucking bastard!" Will exploded in a barrage of curses, his voice raising as swears flew from his mouth. In both French and English. He threw his arms at Hannibal, hitting him in the shoulder as he drove.

Hannibal sat there without moving, taking Will's curses and punches as if he was telling him the weather. He did not respond.

"I told you I didn't wanna go back. We're gonna get caught you son of a bitch!" Will continued to scream in the car until he tired himself out.

"Are you done with your tantrum?" Hannibal asked with a raised eyebrow.
"Fuck you." Will spat, his temper boiling hot.

"But that's your job." Hannibal tried to joke, and it worked as he earned a snort out of Will.

"Shut up," Will mumbled and turned to look out the window, watching as they rushed by the trees. His stomach grumbled and he immediately regretted that drink.

They stopped at the graveyard first. They were quick to find Will's father's final resting place. The headstone was simple, something small and stubby.

William Ed Graham Sr.

Beloved Father

"He didn't want anything, that bastard. Not even a bible verse."

Hannibal gave Will a curious look. Will sighed and scratched the nape of his neck before opening his mouth again.

"He had his issues with them after they ridiculed him for the divorce."

Hannibal smiled, somehow amused.

"Why are you all teeth?" Will chuffed.

"I just didn't know that you were a Junior," Hannibal confessed.

"Not somethin' I advertise. Somethin'bout not wantin' to be in my daddy's shadow..." he trailed off, his accent thickening like honey as emotion curled into a lump in his throat. Will stared down at his father's headstone. Wiping away tears that never came, he turned around and stalked toward the gates.

"Will!" Hannibal called after him and used his longer stride to catch up rather quickly. He put a hand on Will's hunched shoulder. Under his unusually cold touch, Will relaxed and stopped in his tracks.

"Your mother's not here. I didn't find a death certificate."

Will whirled around to face Hannibal, his eyes unreadable.

"Then where is she?" Will asked with a gruff voice, as if he was holding something back. The dam had not yet broken, but it was surely on its way.

"She doesn't speak English." Will said as he walked towards the front door of the facility. "Just French."

" *Well,* " Hannibal began in said language. " *It's a good thing I speak it, isn't that right?* " Will rolled his eyes, but nevertheless opened the door to the nursing home for Hannibal.

He greeted the nurse and told her who he was here to see. She looked at him funny.

"Sorry," she apologized, "your siblings never told me about you."

Will looked to Hannibal with furrowed brows. Hannibal placed a hand on his shoulder as the nurse walked away and leaned in to whisper in his ear.

"I'm afraid, my dear Will, that your mother remarried. She had three more children."

Will swallowed down the lump in his throat and nodded.

"I suppose you want to find them?" Will choked out.

"No. Maybe in a different life," Hannibal said as he rubbed Will's back. The nurse returned and gestured for the two.

"I have to warn you," she began. "She's not too lucid today. You'll have to be patient," she advised with pleading eyes.

Will nearly doubled over, bile rising in his throat. Meeting Hannibal, and having endured everything Hannibal had put him through had only made him familiar with the sour taste.

Entering the room, Will needed no one to guide him. He spotted his mother sitting in the corner of the room. He approached like he would a stray dog, his eyes wide. Still, the tears did not flow. But his heart rabbited in his ears.

He didn't remember making it across the room. One minute he was in the doorway and the next he was by her side.

She stared up at him with the blue eyes she gave him, her white hair just as curly as his.

"William?" She whispered, her posture straigtening. Will refused to let his empathy free, having locked it in a padlocked box when they entered the nursing home. Even so, he could see the fear in her eyes.

Will leaned down to hug his mother, and she accepted the hug with vigor. She leaned into his embrace, wrapping her arms around Will's neck. She placed her chin on his shoulder, so her lips were next to his ear. Her lips parted, a quiet whisper following, " *I saw you on the news. I know what you did.* "

Will froze, his body tensing up in his mother's arms.

" *Mama,* " Will entreated, " *how about we go for a walk?* " With his hand resting on her back, he helped the elderly woman out of his chair and Hannibal handed her walker to her.

"Who are you, again?" The woman asked, her voice shaking as she did.

"I'm your son, William. Do you remember, Mama?" She looked at him curiously, her thin brows scrunched up. Then, she smiled at him.

"You know, you look just like my son." Will swallowed the lump in his throat and forced a grin.

"Is that right?" He drawled sweetly, his voice soothing like warm honey. Hannibal looked to Will with a look of concern.

I'm alright , he mouthed. The woman turned to Hannibal and with a great big smile, asked. "Can you please hold my purse? You know, you're a fine young man. But I don't want my boy around a murderer."

Patients and visiting family members stared in shock. Hannibal shot Will a look, and he quickly understood. His heart sank to his stomach.

"Mama, you're talking nonsense, now. C'mon now, let's go on that walk."

The birds perched in the branch of a black gum tree gazed upon the world from their place nestled in the fork in the trunk. Not a care in the world, chirping away, their songs filling the air which was perfumed with invasive honeysuckle and moss-- an earthy scent with a hint of something sweet. Cicadas buzzed and grasshoppers played their instruments. The bellowing of crocodiles joined in the chorus. Dogs yipped in the distance, their barking carrying across the swamp water.

Startled, the birds flew away from the tree, scattering like marbles skittering across sun-warmed pavement.

The trees swayed in the breeze, as if they shook in terror, the leaves gasping as they rustled. The stars in the sky winked, flirting with the water of the bayou as it twinkled across the surface, creating a crystalline pattern that sparkled brighter than diamonds.

Will stumbled out from in between the trees, blood on his hands and staining the chest of his shirt. Hannibal followed after, donning a shimmering plastic suit.

"She knew," Will cried out to Hannibal, "How did she know?" He sobbed, tears falling down his face and mixing with the spray of blood on his cheeks. He fell into Hannibal, his bloody hands grasping at his shoulders. The plastic made his hands slip and slide with the blood, and Will fell forward. His knees sunk into the mud, his hands gripping it like it would ground him. It squelched between his fingers as he squeezed, his fingernails digging into the wet ground.

"Let's get you cleaned up, my darling." Hannibal reached down to touch Will's shoulders, leaning down over his frame to try and get him to stand up. Hannibal brought Will to his feet. They were shaking.

Hannibal took his hand and brought him to the river side. "Wash your hands, Sweet William." Hannibal cooed. "We'll figure this out. Together." Hannibal assured with a calm voice. It did not waver with uncertainty or crack with doubt. And so, Will believed him.

The younger man washed himself in the stream, washing the blood from his hands and the mud from under his fingernails. A hum drifted from Hannibal's throat, the tune trickling just as the water did. He continued to hum as Will washed himself off, as if that would ground his lover back into the present.

"Hannibal." Will murmured, his voice low and drowned out by the trickle of the stream. "What are we going to do?"

"We'll figure it out." Hannibal reassured, holding Will by the shoulders. "We always do."

"Mama..." Will murmured, looking down at his bloody hands. Tears sprung from his eyes, falling down his face in rivulets that could cut rock.

"You had no other choice, Will," Hannibal reasoned. "She would have been our demise."

Will nodded and wiped his tears away with the ends of his sleeves.

"At least it was quick," he murmured. Hannibal embraced him, his arms cradling Will's head to his chest. "At least it was quick," he repeated to himself. He continued to repeat the same phrase over and over as Hannibal carressed his dark curls, as if anything at all could justify what he'd done.

Will Graham— the prodigal orphan.

End Notes

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